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STATE FOR WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/30/2019

TAGS: PGOV KDEM PREL HO

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES ELECTIONS WITH PRESIDENT ZELAYA

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶11. (C) Summary: The Ambassador and President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya discussed the results of the general elections. Zelaya believes turnout was minimal and that the process had not been credible. The Ambassador countered by passing on the data available suggesting that the process had been free and fair, and that turnout had been substantial. The success of the Honduran elections are a major blow to Zelaya who staked a very hard line public position unsuccessfully calling for a boycott and arguing that the process was illegitimate and illegal. Zelaya is isolated and has a distorted perspective of what is happening in Honduras. The Ambassador encouraged him to reach out to the newly-elected authorities. End Summary.

¶12. (C) The Ambassador spoke yesterday afternoon (November 29) with President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya to discuss the results of the elections. Zelaya said that the information he was getting from his supporters across the country were that the voter abstention had been extremely high and estimated at 60-65 percent. Zelaya insisted that the low participation rate reflected the Honduran people's rejection of the election process in the wake of the June 28 coup. The Ambassador responded that we understood his strong views and questions about the elections in light of the coup and the prevalence of human rights violations, including suppression of some of the opposition media. However, the Ambassador stressed once again that the U.S. believed that the election process was a legitimate process. The Ambassador mentioned that most of the election mechanism had been established prior to the coup and during his presidency, including the holding of national primaries, the election of new magistrates to the Supreme Elections Tribunal (TSE), and the formal calling of elections and funding of the process. The Ambassador stressed that the TSE was accountable to its stakeholders, the political parties, and not to the ruling government, whether his legitimate government or the de facto regime.

¶13. (C) The Ambassador expressed respectful but strong disagreement with Zelaya over the elections. The Ambassador noted that he had visited 10 polling centers and 80 voting tables in working and poor neighborhoods. He noted that the organization of the event had been excellent and that the turnout had been impressive. The Ambassador also noted that the data received from U.S. Embassy staff deployed in 16 of

the 18 regional departments, as well as information reported by the NDI, IRI and other credible domestic and international observers, suggested a free, fair and transparent process had taken place. The Ambassador advised President Zelaya to leave a door open for engaging with the new authorities and initiating a dialogue that could contribute to a solution to the crisis. Zelaya agreed that he needed to look more carefully at the data, but remained skeptical. He agreed that he needed to consider taking advantage of the opportunity of the election of a new president-elect and engage in direct conversations.

¶4. (C) Comment: From his "bunker-like" compound in the Brazilian Embassy, Zelaya is increasingly out of touch. Surrounded by the most ideological of his supporters, Zelaya is being fed a constant stream of distorted information about reality outside of the walls of the chancery. It is important to remain in touch with him and attempt as best as possible to expose him to other views and perspectives. We will continue to do this.

LLORENS